

## El, Hop, a Bear, and the Vacation by rosswrites

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**Summary:**

When El wants to get away, a well meaning lake side vacation turns out to be the worst possible idea.

# El, Hop, a Bear, and the Vacation

## Author's Note:

This took forever to write and I love it to death. Super fluffy and very angsty. In the same timeline as my other fics.

Timeline: April 1985. Can be read alone or as a prequel to "The One Where El Steals a Dog."

All of these fics (and more shorter and better) writing is on Tumblr @strange-thangs.

Let's assume it is a warm April afternoon.

A *vacation*, Hopper had called it: leave Thursday morning, arrive that afternoon. Leave Tuesday morning, be back home by Tuesday afternoon. In El's mind, getting away from Hawkins is always a treat. *Though she wouldn't consider her one trip to Chicago a vacation.*

What made *this* trip different was the fact that this time El wasn't running *to* a place. She was *leaving*. Hawkins was stressful and at times downright *miserable*.

While planning and prepping and studying and tutoring for her first year of high school was sometimes enjoyable, more often than not it was hell. Unlike her friends, who had both Saturday *and* Sunday off, El was learning *every day* and quizzed *every night*. She had a goal: catch up with her friends and join them in the fall. She'd do it even if it meant late nights and painful study sessions.

El (and Hopper) had noticed a change in herself. She became even more tired than usual, hungrier than ever before, and more agitated and moody than any teen Hopper had ever come into contact with (which he gladly told her). That's why, one Sunday over mid-morning breakfast, El asked for a break. No school, no friends, no Hawkins.

She wanted something new. Granted, she was constantly discovering

new things, given her life before Hopper, and these things were so intriguing. But what El wanted was some new *place*. Her excursion to Chicago left her wide eyed and mystified. Knowing that some *place* like that exists, with no trees and no corn fields and no cabins, El longed to go back.

So, when El had told Hopper that she wanted a break, a vacation, she was ecstatic to hear that he knew of exactly the place that would take her mind far away from Hawkins, Indiana.

When Hopper had told her that they were going to a special place in Kentucky, El had assumed that this vacation would be alright. *Kentucky has cities too, right?*

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By the time El opens her eyes, her head resting on the passenger seat in Hopper's truck, the trees that she thought would've been gone seem to be thicker than they were back home. The road they're driving on is curvy and the view of the mountains in the distance seems to give El a bit of queasiness. Indiana is mostly flat, so the sight of a large cliffs and exposed rocks send shivers down her spine. The temperature in the truck is slowly climbing, even with the windows down. The shorts and t-shirt she's wearing feel like heavy bricks against her skin

"Glad you're awake," Hopper mumbles.

El notices that he's sweating too, most likely from the jeans and short sleeve shirt he's wearing. He didn't take his eyes off the road, for what El fears is intense focus on not driving off the side of the mountain pass.

"How long till the city?" El questions, her eyes scanning the vast canyon. She rubs her eyes, because *something isn't right. This is nothing like Chicago.*

"City?" Hopper asks, a slight smile breaking across his face. "There's no city here. You wanted to get away, right? The cabin's about as far away from people as possible."

"CABIN?" El shouts, turning her head so fast her curls have to catch

up.

“Just...just wait,” Hopper pleads. “You’ll be surprised.”

El crosses her arms and shifts her body so her back is facing Hopper. She’s pissed, angry that she didn’t question where they were going before they left, angry that he didn’t understand her and what she needed, angry that she’s going to be in another cabin. *It’s not a vacation if you’re doing the same stuff in a different place!*

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“It’s not the cabin,” Hopper says, putting the truck in park. El can sense a sort of giddiness in his voice. “It’s so much better. Come on.”

Unenthusiastically stepping out of the truck, El only has to walk a little bit before she’s greeted by a sight that takes her breath away.

It’s a cabin for sure, but nothing like her home in Hawkins. This cabin seems twice the size of Mike’s house, the massive logs that form the walls are almost as big as the trees that surround it. It was some rich man’s log cabin.

“I have a friend from back in Indianapolis. Cabin’s his weekend getaway but he owed me a favor, so we get it till Tuesday.”

El turns to Hopper and quietly smiles. Grabbing all the bags she can carry, El sprints to the front door, and with a nod of her head, it unlocks and swings open with moments to spare before she flies into the cabin.

Rather than the dark brown wood and minimal windows from her own cabin, this one is head to toe a warm, a light brown that reminds her of the split logs from their fireplace. A massive kitchen with a stove El had only dreamed of cooking with is at her right. Two refrigerators hide in the corner, opposite a large window that gives the view of the mountain they had traveled down not long ago.

The rest of the cabin is open and airy. At the center, tall ceilings with exposed beams seem to hover over the living room, which has large leather chairs and a sofa that appears to be longer than El’s entire bedroom. At the end of the room there is two glass doors that look

over something blue and shimmering.

Before El can make out what is through the glass doors, the sound of Hopper dropping bags of food in the kitchen tells her that she should probably help her father unpack.

Yet, another distraction pulls her attention elsewhere. A wooden ladder stands leaning against the wall, leading up to a loft, not too different from the one in their own home. Dropping her bags, El begins to climb the ladder, and, reaching the top, she sees a small bedroom. Levitating her bags up and placing them on the bed, El sighs. She sits down at the top of the ladder with her feet hanging and starts to think that maybe this cabin might not be too bad.

“El?” Hopper calls from the kitchen.

“What?” El asks, mimicking his tone.

“Where are my peanuts? You packed them, right?” Hopper’s voice took on what El could only describe as the voice you make when you’re don’t want to get angry but you already know it’s coming. She’s dealt with that voice too much.

Hopper had given into Joyce’s demands and quit both smoking and drinking. It was hell for the first few weeks, but he’d discovered that snacking on peanuts often stifled his addiction. Hopper without peanuts is irritable and almost as moody as his teenage daughter.

“Um,” El stalled, wondering if she really did forget the one thing her father reminded her to bring. “I don’t know. There wasn’t enough room in the red bag. Maybe the blue bag?”

“No, they’re not in there,” El heard him call out, as she makes her way down the ladder. Dealing with Hopper face to face makes it harder for him to get angry. Separating herself from him always made things worse.

“Are you sure you checked...” El stops mid-sentence when she sees Hopper standing next to one of the open refrigerators, three boxes of Eggos in his hands.

“I’m guessing it’s just coincidence that you didn’t have enough room

for the one thing I asked for but for two more boxes of Eggos than I said you could bring?"

El didn't speak. She hated admitting she was wrong, hated saying sorry, hated being called out for being stupid. Not because she always thought she was right. No, she hated saying sorry because it made her hate herself even more. It was an extra knife wound on top of already knowing she'd messed up. She'd said sorry before, but only in times when her silence wasn't enough. Those times when just knowing someone was broken and mutual agreement wouldn't suffice.

"Seriously, kid, I don't know why I still put up with you," Hopper mumbles, rolling his eyes. El stands still, her eyes not lifting from her toes. "There's a pack of peanuts in the glove compartment and a box in the back. Bring them in, put away the rest of the food, then meet me out back. Deal?"

"Deal."

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When El finishes all of the unpacking Hopper is already outside. The big glass doors are open and she can feel a breeze that she never felt in all her time in Hawkins. It didn't smell of musty sheets or cleaning solution, of cigarettes or hospital gowns, of coffee or recycled air. It smelled like something so radically different, something so unusual that El couldn't help but stand mystified, closing her eyes as to block out everything around her and log that new smell in her brain, so she would remember it for some time later on.

After a moment of bliss, El proceeds through the glass doors and is taken aback by beauty once more. This time, however, it is the sight of a lake, blue and still, nestled silently between two large mountains.

Stepping off the covered porch, El notices Hopper sitting on a wooden dock in shorts that were slightly too short and a short sleeved button-down. El was still getting used to casual Hopper, even after spending over a year with him. Resting next to him are his shoes and socks. His feet are in the water, slowly swaying back and forth. Beside him lay a red bag El recalls containing their lunch for the day.

“It’s Nolin Lake,” Hopper says as El takes off her shoes and sits down next to him, putting her feet into the water. It’s colder than she expected, but the warm afternoon sunlight makes up for the difference in temperature.

“It’s smaller than the one in town,” El says as she reaches into basket to pull out one of sandwiches Hopper had pre-made.

“Duh wae inm tow?” Hopper asks, his slightly confused tone muffled by a full mouth.

“Mike took me to the lake one day,” El responds monotonously, knowing full well that Hopper knew exactly what lake she was talking about.

“Mike too you Lovers Lake?!” Hopper spits out the small remaining bits of his food and turns to the small girl sitting next to him.

Bright red in the face, El decides to diffuse the tension, tilting her head and sending a small splash of water up to Hopper’s face.

“Jesus, kid!” Hopper nearly falls forward into the water but steadies himself. “I trust you didn’t do anything stupid, right?”

“I’m not stupid, Dad,” El replies, slightly taken aback.

“That’s not what I meant and you know it.”

The two sit in silence, continuing to eat their lunches. It’s quiet, but not the kind of quiet El had long gotten used to back home. No, this quiet was loud, filled with the sound of swaying water, of birds chirping, and of the breeze passing by her ears. She never wants to leave. Placing the second half of her sandwich back in its bag and into the basket, El closes her eyes and soaks in each of her senses.

“Mammoth Cave isn’t too far,” Hopper speaks up, his voice sounding like gunfire after the silence El was learning to love. “I went there as a kid with my parents. We can wake up late, head over there whenever?”

“Sounds like fun.” El tries to hide the excitement boiling in her. She’d read about Mammoths in one of her history textbooks Mike had given

her. Though she knew they'd long gone extinct, seeing the fossils was the next best thing.

"We can go hiking too, if you want," Hopper speaks up again. El wasn't and still isn't one to carry a conversation. "We can go exploring like we used to."

El's face loses its glow and goes pale. Though the time spent with Hopper alone in the cabin was crucial and necessary (she loved getting to go out and explore with him), the reminders still poked like daggers at her heart. She was still making up for the lost year with her friends, still slightly angry that Hopper let Mike suffer, still angry that everything still wasn't righted.

"Or not, you know," Hopper asserts, noticing how his daughter wasn't responding, even with a facial expression, which more often than not was her main form of dialogue. "We can do whatever."

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The sound of a radio crackling to life wakes El up from a quick nap on the porch. She had fallen asleep eating the rest of her sandwich. The sun had moved only slightly, telling El that only an hour or so had passed. Turning to see where the ungodly noise that woke her up had come from, she sees Hopper sitting in the kitchen fiddling with the dials on a large box.

Suddenly the sound of a voice breaks through, speaking in a code that El knew quite well. *Police scanner.*

Placing the rest of her sandwich down, El makes her way into the cabin, trying not to laugh at the sight of her father so intensely listening to static, not too different than what she had done every day in her own cabin.

"I thought this was a *vacation*," El mocks, crossing her arms. Hopper had been the one who suggested that she refrain from using her powers to visit her friends, thus having him basically do the same thing wasn't any bit fair in her eyes. "Vacation means no work, right?"



"I'm not working," Hopper explains. "I'm listening."

Rolling her eyes, El turns to leave, but she's caught off guard by a man's voice coming through the radio.

*Charlie, we've got multiple reports of a bear sighting east of Nolin Lake.*

"Of course," Hopper grumbles, turning down the radio.

El watches silently as he stands up from the table and walks over to his bedroom on the first floor of the cabin. Moments later he walks out carrying one long box and one smaller box.

"I knew there was gonna be a bear," Hopper says to himself, opening the larger box to reveal a long rifle that El had only seen once before.

"First you bring the radio, now you bring that too?" El tries to cross her arms tighter but she's already angry enough at her father. *Apparently the 'no work' agreement had only applied to her.*

"Just in case," Hopper continues, opening up the smaller box to reveal golden bullets. "One day I'm gonna teach you how to use this."

El rolls her eyes and quietly stomps out of the cabin and back to her spot on the porch.

Was she angry? Yes. But a feeling twisted her heart. El understands that she probably should've expected it from her father. He had a way of distorting the truth, of playing the game to his advantage, of always getting what he wanted.

Dropping herself into the still warm chair, El closes her eyes and tries to fall back asleep. *This is supposed to be a vacation, and it's turning into problem after problem.*

The sounds of the birds and the water are soothing, yet the simple crack of a stick causes El to snap awake. Her months alone in the winter wilderness taught her that no stick broke without reason and every sound was important.

More and more snapping sticks leads El to stand up from her seat and look around, but the dock and the area in front of the porch are

barren. Peering back inside the cabin, El sees how Hopper still hasn't left the table, completely unaware of the sounds of outside.

Stepping off the porch, El scans the wilderness, the thick trees, the dark brown forest floor around her. The snapping stops. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a quiet *thud*.

El spins around to see a brown mass wiggling near the base of one of the trees. Cautiously walking towards it, El realizes it's some kind of animal, too round and small to be a dog like the Byers', but large enough to force her to take each step slowly and carefully.

The animal rights itself and El realizes that it's no dog, but a *baby bear*. Hopper had warned her about wild animals, but something about this bear pulled her closer.

The brown cub, El notices, wouldn't put weight on one of its legs. It whimpered softly, only loud enough for El to hear. The sight reminded her of the time when Mike had hurt himself walking her home one night, of the time in the forest alone in December when she had killed a rabbit and it cried slowly until she had put it out of its misery. She hadn't harmed an animal since.

Walking towards the cub, El kneels down, and lets it hobble towards her. Picking it up, the slightly soft fur in her arms, El can't help but hold it close. *I won't let anyone hurt you*, she thinks.

For fear of Hopper peering out of the cabin, El rushes over to the base of the porch, cub in hand, and quickly places it in an empty red container underneath the deck. Running up onto the porch, El grabs what was left of her sandwich and, in one quick jump, she lands down and places it in the container next to the cub. *No one can hurt you here*.

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The rest of the afternoon is spent quietly, as Hopper had fallen asleep on the large sofa. This gave El freedom to sit on the porch and check on the cub every once and a while. She continues this pattern until dinner is ready.

Dinner with the Hopper's is as quiet as usual. Hopper, as always, is

the first to speak, but only after noticing that El gets up to leave with her plate having only eaten half of her dinner.

“You feelin’ alright, kid?” Hopper asks, only just starting to dig into his baked potato.

“I’m not hungry,” El responds.

She knows she’s not lying. She isn’t one to eat huge meals but rather one to snack all day. She blames lonely life in the cabin for that.

In the kitchen, El begins to brush off the excess food into the trash, but, peering over her shoulder, she quietly shoves the uneaten potato into her pocket. She also quietly levitates apple slices into her hand from the counter and places them in her other pocket.

Sneaking past Hopper, El makes her way towards the porch, but is caught. He has a tendency to catch her, only with his eyes, a stare that speaks silently. It stopped her in her tracks.

“You sure you’re ok?” Hopper asks sincerely, a tone El was not expecting. “You’re spending a lot of time outside.”

“I didn’t get much time outside before,” El retorts. She understood sarcasm and used it well. Her propensity for short sentences made her jabs just that much more biting.

Hopper only laughed.

With the potato still warm in her pocket and the apple slices making her shorts wet, El steps past the glass doors and onto the porch, the fading sunlight turning red as it reflects off the still lake.

The sound of rustling underneath the porch brings a smile to El’s face. She reaches into her pockets and pulls out the apples and potatoes.

When she makes it down to the bottom step, El sees the once occupied container leaning over on its side, the small cub nowhere in sight. Panicking, El drops the food and turns quickly, only to see the largest bear she had ever seen staring her down no more than twenty feet away from her.

Terrified, El's first response is to slowly step back, but that makes no difference in the moment, as the bear stands up on its back legs. El is forced to lift her head to maintain eye contact.

El's second response is to throw the empty red container at the bear, not hit it, but rather scare it away.

This, unfortunately, does not work. It only makes it angrier. El notices the small cub hidden next to the huge bear. Slowly the bear moves forward, each step a miniature earthquake in her heart.

Searching through her mind, El can't find an option that doesn't end poorly. Either she injures (or worse, kills) the bear, breaking her streak of never injuring an animal in over a year, or she screams, terrifying the bear and in the process alerting Hopper.

Just as the bear moved closer, the sound of a gunshot booms in her ears, echoing off the mountains and seemingly going on and on throughout the valley. Watching the bear and the cub scatter off into the forest, El turns to see Hopper standing right behind her, his rifle still pointed at the sky.

"Are you ok?" Hopper asks, lowering his gun and walking over to El.

Still terrified, El only nods. The thought of dealing with Hopper's wrath now imminent.

"What happened..." Hopper asks, stopping when he notices the uneaten potato and apple slices lying in the dirt. His face goes red as he sees the left-over pieces of a sandwich in a container not too far away.

"Inside," Hopper booms. "Now!"

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Standing face to face in the living room, El crosses her arms and stares at her bare feet. Hopper, running his hands through his hair, speaks first.

"What the hell were you thinking?" He's not shouting. *It's worse*, El fears. *He's disappointed*. "Feeding a bear?"

El remains silent.

“El, what were you thinking!” Hopper raises his voice, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose.

“They were going to hurt him.” El speaks softly, raising her eyes to meet his.

She’s no longer angry at herself. She’s angry at *him*.

“*You* were going to hurt him,” she accuses, pointing to the gun resting on the sofa.

“El,” Hopper sighs. “You can’t protect every animal you meet!”

“But no one got hurt,” El retorts.

“Because I was there!” Hopper squeezes his hands into fists. “What if I wasn’t? You have to think before you act.”

“You were going to hurt it!” El shouts.

“This...” Hopper pauses, choosing his words carefully. “This isn’t about the bear. This is about you! You could’ve been hurt. You could’ve been killed.”

El stares silently. She knew Hopper was right. She knew she didn’t have it in her to kill the bear and, without Hopper being there, she might not have survived. But she would never admit that.

“If you’re gonna make stupid decisions,” Hopper says pointedly, “maybe you aren’t ready for school.”

“No!” El yells. The lights in the cabin begin to flicker.

“Stupid people don’t go to school!”

“You won’t,” El hisses.

“I can call Owens right now,” Hopper booms. “You know what...”

Hopper reaches for the phone resting near the end of the sofa, but before he can, the phone launches across the room and smashes into

the wall.

Defiantly, El wipes the blood under her nose and marches up the ladder to the loft.

Part of her is pissed she doesn't have a door to slam. It's as if the world is doing its best to make her more frustrated. Forcefully sighing, El decides to knock the ladder down, and with a crash, El is left alone in the loft, crying in her bed.

It's twelve hours before El comes down.

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At seven am Hopper hears the scrape of wood sliding across wood. He steps out of the kitchen to see the ladder set itself upright.

In silence, El descends from the loft and sets herself down on the sofa. With a nod of her head the television turns on. Scanning through the channels, El becomes disgruntled when she realizes that this television does not get any of the same channels as the one at home.

She only leaves the sofa twice before dinner: once for the bathroom and once for water.

It's another twelve hours before El eats.

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Hopper decides to make a full dinner: chicken, peas, and carrots.

Unsurprisingly, he eats alone.

El makes her own food: Eggos and apples. She takes her dinner outside, intending to eat alone on the dock, but a sudden downpour forces her to eat in silence on the covered porch.

It's another twelve hours before El sits down to eat with Hopper.

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At seven am again, El descends the ladder. The sound of frying eggs hums throughout the cabin.

Sitting down at the table, El waits for Hopper to bring out the plate of eggs.

El remains and silent conversation occurs. Neither El nor Hopper make so much as a whisper of recognition.

That day Hopper and El wordlessly travel to Mammoth Cave. It was Hopper's idea. In what seems like another curse by the world, El learns that in fact *there are no mammoth fossils in Mammoth Cave*. She is miserable.

It's another twelve hours before the silence ends.

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As the sun inches behind the mountain peaks across the lake, Hopper steps out on to the back porch, eying the small figure sitting at the end of the dock, only her curls distinguishable in her shadow.

Quietly, Hopper watches the girl swing a fishing line over her shoulder and cast it far into the water. The simple sound of plastic casters breaking the water's surface disturbs the noiselessness.

El's almost year-long stay in the Hawkins cabin was not without its lessons. Hopper had taken her for nature walks, teaching her which plants were poisonous, teaching her how to set up a trap, teaching her how to fish.

She loves the peacefulness of fishing. She cares not for the prospect of catching something, but for the serenity that comes before.

Sitting on the dock, El is quite content with never moving again.

The tranquility lasts only moments longer.

With a jolt, the fishing rod lurches forward, El only just latching her fingers around the soft foam grip seconds before it would have flew into the water. Momentarily noticing that Hopper had walked up behind her, El's focus leaves from the whizzing twine on the fishing rod. In a flash of panic, El yanks the rod, only to feel all of the tension vanish.

"You pulled too hard," Hopper says nonchalantly, sliding off his

shoes and socks.

El does not turn around to greet him, nor does she make eye contact with him when he sits down next to her, his feet sliding into the water right beside hers.

“We were both stupid,” Hopper utters under his breath. “I shouldn’t have gotten angry. You’ve worked so hard and I’m so proud of you and when you make these stupid mistakes it just...just makes me feel like I’ve failed you. I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry for being angry,” El mutters.

Though El whispered the words monotonously, she had given the all her heart into her decision to speak them. She thought of the word often, how it yelled in her mind every time she made a mistake, every time she hurt someone, every time she saw Mike. But here, in this instant, *sorry* becomes the only word that fills the void she had been building up over the past two days. She was *sorry*.

She turns her head to her father. “I’m sorry for being stupid.”

Hopper smiles, wrapping an arm around her and pulling her close.

“Can we both promise to be less stupid?” Hopper questions.

“Promise,” El responds.

Unexpectedly there is another tug on her line. El quickly realizes that she has another chance to reel in something *big*. Taking Hopper’s advice, El softly reels in the line, and, with a nod of her head, she lifts a large fish out of the water.

Hopper eagerly takes the fish and line from El’s hands and turns to her, smiling.

“Looks like we got dinner,” Hopper laughs.

Panic flies across El’s face. Hopper had always let her put the fish back after they caught them.

Hopper is already halfway to the cabin before El comes up with the



words she wants to throw at him. Yet, she decides, it might be alright to let some things go.

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Walking back up the porch steps, El notices the empty red container still lying on its side. She couldn't save everyone, but she could try.

**Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading! I'd love to hear your thoughts and opinions!